

A Parent's Guide To Vermont's Child Welfare & Youth Justice Agency



Protecting children & supporting families. Because families matter!

Department for Children and Families

Family Services Division

Mailing Address:

103 South Main Street, Osgood 3
Waterbury, VT 05671-2401

Website: <http://www.dcf.vt.gov/fsd>

Phone: (802) 241-2131

24-Hour Child Abuse Hotline: 1-800-649-5285

District Offices: See district phone numbers on back cover

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Acknowledgements

The Family Services Division of the Vermont Department for Children and Families would like to thank the parents, staff, and others who dedicated their time and energy to helping us make this guide as helpful as possible for families in Vermont. *Thank you!*

This information is important. If you need help understanding it, tell us.

Ova informacija je važna. Ako Vam je potrebna pomoć da je razumijete, obavijestite nas. *(Bosnian)*

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Ces informations sont importantes. Si vous avez besoin d'aide pour les comprendre, dites-le nous. *(French)*

Iyi n'inkenzuzo ngirakamaro. Tubwire, mugihe woba ushaka impfashanyo y'ugusobanukirwa. *(Kirundi)*

यो जानकारी महत्वपूर्ण छ। यदि तपाईंलाई यो बुझ्न सहयोग चाहिएमा, हामीलाई भन्नुहोस्। *(Nepali)*

Macluumaadkan waa muhiim. Haddii aad u baahan tahay caawimaad ah fahanka macluumaadka, noo sheeg. *(Somali)*

Esta información es importante. Si usted necesita ayuda para comprenderla, infórmenos. *(Spanish)*

Maelezo haya ni muhimu. Ikiwa unahitaji msaada wa kuyafahamu, tueleze. *(Swahili)*

Đây là thông tin quan trọng. Nếu quý vị cần trợ giúp để hiểu thông tin này, hay cho chúng tôi biết. *(Vietnamese)*

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Introduction

Welcome to *A Parent's Guide to Vermont's Child Welfare & Youth Justice Agency*. It provides a good overview of how the child welfare and youth justice system works in Vermont.

If you are reading it, your family is likely involved in some way with the Family Services Division of the Department for Children and Families (DCF). You probably have lots of questions and some anxiety about what may happen.

The guide was written, with the help of families who have been in your shoes, to:

- ➔ Explain what's happening to your family;
- ➔ Help you understand our role;
- ➔ Answer your questions;
- ➔ Lessen your anxiety about the process; and
- ➔ Connect you to resources that can help your family—even after our involvement ends.

We want to work with you to create the best outcomes for your family. If you still have questions after you read this guide, please ask!

Tips for Parents

- ✓ Read this guide! It will help you understand what we do and why we do it.
- ✓ Use the table of contents to quickly find the sections that are most relevant to you. Depending on your situation, you may find some sections more useful than others.
- ✓ Don't be afraid to ask questions. The system is complicated, and you may have questions about your situation that a guide simply cannot answer.
- ✓ Find someone to talk to who will listen to you, help you think clearly, and support you through the process. This could be a relative, friend, or professional you've been working with (e.g., therapist, family advocate, parent educator, AA sponsor). Having the support of someone you trust will help.
- ✓ Try to find other parents who have been through the system. Ask your social worker if there are parents nearby who are willing to talk to you about their experience.

Tips for Parents

Being involved with the system can be stressful. Below are tips that can help you keep track of everything that's happening.

1. Get a notebook and divide it into four sections:

A. Contact Information

Record the names, phone numbers, and email addresses of the people you'll be working with, including:

- Your social worker and his or her supervisor (in case you can't reach the worker);
- Other professionals such as a Family Time Coach, lawyer, Guardian ad Litem, and therapist; and
- The foster parents if applicable.

B. Phone Call Log

Keep a record of the calls you make and get. Include information such as:

- Who you called, who called you, and when;
- The phone number you called;
- Who you spoke to and what was said;
- Who agreed to do what and by when; and
- If you have to leave a message, when your call was returned.

C. Actions Taken

Write down the actions you take as part of your case plan and the dates.

D. Questions & Answers

Keep track of the questions you have for your social worker or someone else you are working with. When you get an answer, write it down. Don't be afraid to ask questions!

2. Get a folder to keep important documents related to your case in one place.

3. Get another folder to keep copies of any emails you send & receive (or save them electronically).

4. Keep your notebook and folders together in one place.

Section 1: The Family Services Division

The Family Services Division (FSD) has two major roles:

1. We are Vermont's child welfare agency.

We are responsible for making sure children and youth are safe from abuse; their basic needs for things like food, clothing, shelter and health care are met; and families are supported to achieve these goals.

In this role, we:

- ➔ Respond to reports of suspected child abuse and neglect;
- ➔ Evaluate children's safety through investigations and assessments;
- ➔ Help parents get the services and supports they need to keep their children at home safely;
- ➔ Place children in temporary out-of-home care when it's necessary to keep them safe;
- ➔ Work with parents and relatives towards the children's safe return home; and
- ➔ Find permanent homes for children who can't return home safely, preferably with relatives or other people they know.

2. We are Vermont's youth justice agency.

We are responsible for providing supports and services to two groups of youth and their families:

1. Youth who are at risk (of harming themselves or others); and
2. Youth who are on juvenile probation.

In this role, we:

- ➔ Assess youth to determine their strengths and challenges;
- ➔ Provide youth with needed supports and services, with an emphasis on personal accountability, responsibility, and rehabilitation;
- ➔ Place youth in temporary out-of-home care when it's necessary to keep them or their communities safe;
- ➔ Work with youth and their parents towards their safe return home; and
- ➔ Find permanent homes for youth who can't return home safely, preferably with relatives or other people they know.

The goal is to make sure children and youth live in safe, supportive, and healthy environments. To that end, we work in partnership with parents, relatives, educators, law enforcement, community-based service providers, courts, foster parents, and others. We do not do this work alone!

Our Practice Model

Our work is guided by the *Family Services Practice Model*, which describes what we want to accomplish with the children, youth and families we serve and how we perform that work. It spells out the:

- ➔ Core values and principles that guide us;
- ➔ Outcomes we want to achieve;
- ➔ Practices that define the professional work of our agency; and
- ➔ Processes we use to get the work done effectively and respectfully.

The Values And Principles That Guide Us:

- ⇒ Children have the right to be safe;
- ⇒ Families have both strengths and challenges;
- ⇒ Everyone can grow and change;
- ⇒ Families know their situations best;
- ⇒ Children should only be separated from their parents (or guardians) when it's necessary to keep them or their communities safe;
- ⇒ When children need out-of-home care, we first consider other family members and friends;
- ⇒ Success is more likely when we involve extended family members & friends in the process — early on;
- ⇒ For real change to occur, we must work cooperatively with families, share responsibility, and hold each other accountable; and
- ⇒ Each family's cultural, ethnic, and spiritual diversity deserves respect.

The Outcomes We Want To Achieve:

- ⇒ *Safety* - Children are safe from abuse, neglect, and risk of harm.
- ⇒ *Permanence* - Children have nurturing families who are legally committed to them & lasting relationships with other caring adults.
- ⇒ *Well-Being* - Children do well in their families, schools, & communities.
- ⇒ *Law Abidance* - Youth are free from delinquent behavior.

To read the complete Practice Model, ask your social worker for a copy or download it from our website at <http://dcf.vermont.gov/fsd/resources/parents>

Laws & Policies That Govern Our Work

Federal Laws

There are several federal laws that govern our work. The main ones are:

1. Title IV of the Social Security Act:
 - a. *Part B - Child And Family Services*
Promotes the development and expansion of coordinated child and family services to ensure all children are raised in safe, loving families.
 - b. *Part E—Federal Payments For Foster Care And Adoption Assistance*
Covers the cost of foster care, adoption subsidies for children with special needs, and training for staff, foster parents, and adoptive parents.
2. Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA):
Outlines the duty and power of States to protect children.
3. Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (JJDP):
Supports state efforts to prevent delinquency and improve the juvenile justice system.

To learn more, go to <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/laws-policies/federal-laws/laws>.

Vermont Laws

There are several state laws that govern our work . The main ones are:

1. Title 33: Human Services, Chapter 49: CHILD WELFARE SERVICES;
2. Title 33: Human Services, Chapter 51: GENERAL PROVISIONS;
3. Title 33: Human Services, Chapter 52: DELINQUENCY PROCEEDINGS; and
4. Title 33: Human Services, Chapter 53: CHILDREN IN NEED OF CARE OR SUPERVISION.

To learn more about these and other state statutes:

1. Go to the Vermont Legislature’s website (<http://www.leg.state.vt.us>);
2. Click on “Vermont Statutes” on the left; and
3. Click on “Title 33” and then the chapter you want to review.

Family Services Rules & Policies

There are a number of rules and policies that guide the work we do with children, youth, and families. These policies cover everything from responding to child abuse and neglect, to working with families in court, to placing children and youth in out-of-home care.

To read Family Services rules and policies:

1. Visit our website at <http://dcf.vermont.gov/fsd>; and
2. Click on either “rules” or “policies” at the bottom left.

Frequently-Asked Questions About FSD

Will you take my child away?

It's important to know that we will work with you on a plan to keep your child at home safely.

Research shows that children and youth are safer, healthier, and more secure when we involve parents and extended family members in planning for their safety and provide parents with the supports and services they need to follow through with the plans.

If we can't put a plan in place to keep your child at home safely, your social worker may take steps to have your situation reviewed by the court. A judge would then decide whether your child needs to be placed in out-of-home care.

FACT: Most children do not enter state custody. Rather, they remain at home while we work with the parents.

What happens if my child is removed from my home?

You can help make sure your child is safe while living away from home by telling us about safe places where he or she might live. This could include with a non-custodial parent, grandparent, other relative, friend, or someone else you think would be willing and able to safely care for your child. Family Services will explore these and other placement options.

You and/or your child will then need to do the work necessary for your child to return home. This work will be outlined in the case plan (*see page 26*).

Will we have to go to court?

You will typically only have to go to court if:

- ➔ You refuse services and the state asks the court to order services;
- ➔ Your child is charged with committing a delinquent act; or
- ➔ Your child is removed from your home.

What if it's my child's behavior that's the issue?

Sometimes, a family will call asking for our help because of their child's behavior (usually an older youth). If this applies to your situation, read *Section 3: Youth Justice in Vermont* starting on page 19.

Section 2: Child Welfare in Vermont

As Vermont's child welfare agency, we are responsible for making sure children and youth are safe, their basic needs are met, and families are supported to achieve these goals.

Families typically come to our attention when we receive reports alleging their children were:

- ➔ Abandoned;
- ➔ Physically, emotionally, or sexually abused;
- ➔ Not provided adequate food, clothing, shelter, or health care (*neglect*);
- ➔ At significant risk of being abused or neglected (*risk of harm*); or
- ➔ Without proper parental care or subsistence, education, medical, or other care necessary for their well-being.

What Happens To Reports We Receive

1. A supervisor reviews each report.

A supervisor reviews each report and decides whether it can be accepted for intervention — according to Vermont law and departmental policy. The supervisor considers several factors including:

- ➔ The child's age;
- ➔ The alleged abuser's relationship to the child; and
- ➔ The nature of the allegation.

If the report is *not accepted*, the family may be referred to services in the community but no further action will be taken by the Family Services Division (FSD).

2. If the report is accepted, the supervisor determines the appropriate intervention.

Vermont law authorizes two types of intervention: assessment and investigation. While the preferred intervention is usually assessment, an investigation is required in certain situations, including when a report alleges that:

- ➔ A child was sexually abused and the alleged perpetrator is over 10 years old;
- ➔ A child is at risk of harm for sexual abuse by an adult;
- ➔ Something a *person responsible for a child's welfare* (see definition on page 17) did or didn't do resulted in a child's death or serious injury to a child; or
- ➔ A *person responsible for a child's welfare* abandoned a child; maliciously punished a child; physically abused a child under three; physically abused a child of any age who does not talk or is not able to walk; or allowed a child to be exposed to methamphetamine production.

To learn more about how reports are screened, go to <http://dcf.vermont.gov/fsd/policies> and read Family Services Policy 51 - Child Safety: Screening Reports of Child Maltreatment.

3. FSD opens an investigation or an assessment.

A social worker is assigned to the case and the selected intervention begins, usually within 72 hours, sooner if a child is in imminent danger.

Both types of intervention could include similar steps:

1. Assessing a child's immediate safety;
2. Assessing the risk of future maltreatment;
3. Determining the outcome of the intervention; and
4. Opening a case for ongoing services if needed.

The start of the child safety intervention is typically when the parents become aware that Family Services is involved with their family.

The main difference between interventions is that an investigation requires a formal determination of whether the reported abuse or neglect happened and should be substantiated, while an assessment does not. This means that an investigation also includes the gathering of information needed to make this determination. For example, taking photographs of any physical bruises, having the child examined by a doctor, or having x-rays taken.

How Child Safety Interventions Begin

Investigations	Assessments
<p>An investigation typically begins with the social worker interviewing the child mentioned in the report or observing the child if she or he does not talk.</p> <p>Vermont law allows Family Services staff to interview children without their parents' knowledge or permission; however, a neutral party must be present. This could include, for example, a teacher, school nurse, school principal, or child care provider.</p> <p>The parents are told about the interview and report as soon as it is reasonable and safe to do so.</p>	<p>An assessment typically begins with the social worker contacting the parent(s) and requesting permission to interview the child mentioned in the report.</p> <p>Parental permission is required to interview the child; however, if the parents refuse to grant their permission, the division may change the intervention from an assessment to an investigation if it's determined necessary to ensure the child's safety.</p>

Next Steps In The Intervention

The following steps may happen for both investigations and assessments.

1. **The Child Safety Assessment (assesses immediate safety issues)**

The social worker's first priority is to assess the child's immediate safety. Using the *SDM® Assessment of Danger and Safety Tool*, the social worker answers questions such as: Is the child safe now? If not, what needs to be done to promote safety? Is out-of-home care necessary? If so, is someone the child knows available to provide care?

The assessment process involves:

- A.** Visiting the family's home;
- B.** Interviewing the parents and any other adults in the home who serve in a parental role;
- C.** Assessing factors such as the child's vulnerability, caretaker conditions that pose a current danger to the child or threaten the child's immediate safety, and the family's capacity to keep the child safe in the immediate future;
- D.** Identifying actions to immediately address any identified dangers/risks; and
- E.** Determining the safety decision:
 - i. Safe - no dangers identified at this time; child appears safe;
 - ii. Conditionally Safe - a safety plan is in place that addresses the identified dangers. If successfully carried out, the child may remain in the home; or
 - iii. Unsafe - a court order or voluntary care agreement with placement outside the home is the only way to protect the child from immediate or serious harm.

2. **The Family Risk Assessment (assesses risk of future maltreatment)**

Using the *SDM® Risk Assessment Tool*, the social worker assesses the risk a family will maltreat a child in the next 12 to 18 months without intervention. If a child's parents don't live together and the child spends time in both homes, a risk assessment may be done for both households.

In most cases, the risk assessment will be completed:

- In an investigation - no later than 60 days from acceptance of a report; and
- In an assessment - no later than 45 days from acceptance of a report.

At the end of the risk assessment, the social worker determines the final risk level:

- Low Risk - case is closed;
- Moderate Risk - case is closed; family may be referred to services in community; or
- High or Very High Risk - case is opened for ongoing services.

To learn more about the assessment tools we use, ask your worker for copies or view them on our website at <http://dcf.vermont.gov/fsd/resources/parents>.

If the alleged perpetrator is not a caregiver or member of the household, a risk assessment would only be conducted if the caregiver's ability to protect the child is in question. *For example:* a risk assessment would not be conducted if a report alleges that a child was sexually abused by a teacher and there is no question about the parents' ability to protect the child from further abuse.

3. The Outcome of the Intervention

At the conclusion of the intervention, the supervisor determines the outcome based on the information gathered. The possible outcomes are described below.

A. Assessment

Results in a determination of the need for ongoing services based on the assessed risk of future maltreatment. If the assessed risk is high or very high, Family Services opens a case to provide the family with ongoing services and works with the family to develop a *Family Support Case Plan* that addresses the identified risks.

B. Investigation

Results in both:

- i. A determination of the need for ongoing services based on the assessed risk of future maltreatment. If the assessed risk is high or very high, Family Services opens a case to provide the family with ongoing services and works with the family to develop a *Family Support Case Plan* that addresses the identified risks; AND
- ii. A formal determination of whether the reported abuse or neglect occurred. If the evidence would lead a reasonable person to believe the child was abused or neglected, the report is *substantiated* and information about the person substantiated is entered into Vermont's Child Protection Registry. (See page 18 for more details about the Registry). If a report is *unsubstantiated*, a case could still be opened for services based on the assessed risk of future maltreatment.

4. Case Opened for Ongoing Services

If a case is opened for ongoing services, a new social worker will probably be assigned to the case. This social worker will work with your family to complete an initial *Family Support Case Plan* — within 60 days of the initial risk assessment. The goal is to keep your family safely together and prevent the need for out-of-home care.

If you refuse ongoing services, Family Services may pursue a court order to address any unresolved dangers.

To learn more about child safety interventions, ask the social worker for a copy of Family Services Policy 52 - Child Safety Interventions: Investigations & Assessments. You can also read it on our website at <http://dcf.vermont.gov/fsd/policies>.

The Family Support Case Plan

If a case is opened for ongoing services, you and your social worker will develop a *Family Support Case Plan*. This process involves:

1. Identifying the issues your family needs to address;
2. Assessing the child's condition (e.g., medical, dental, psychological);
3. Assessing your family's capacity to protect the child;
4. Identifying ways extended family members can help you address your issues; and
5. Identifying the services and supports that will be provided to reduce risk. This could include, for example, individual or family counseling, parenting classes, substance abuse treatment, and job training.

It might help to think of your case plan as a road map that will:

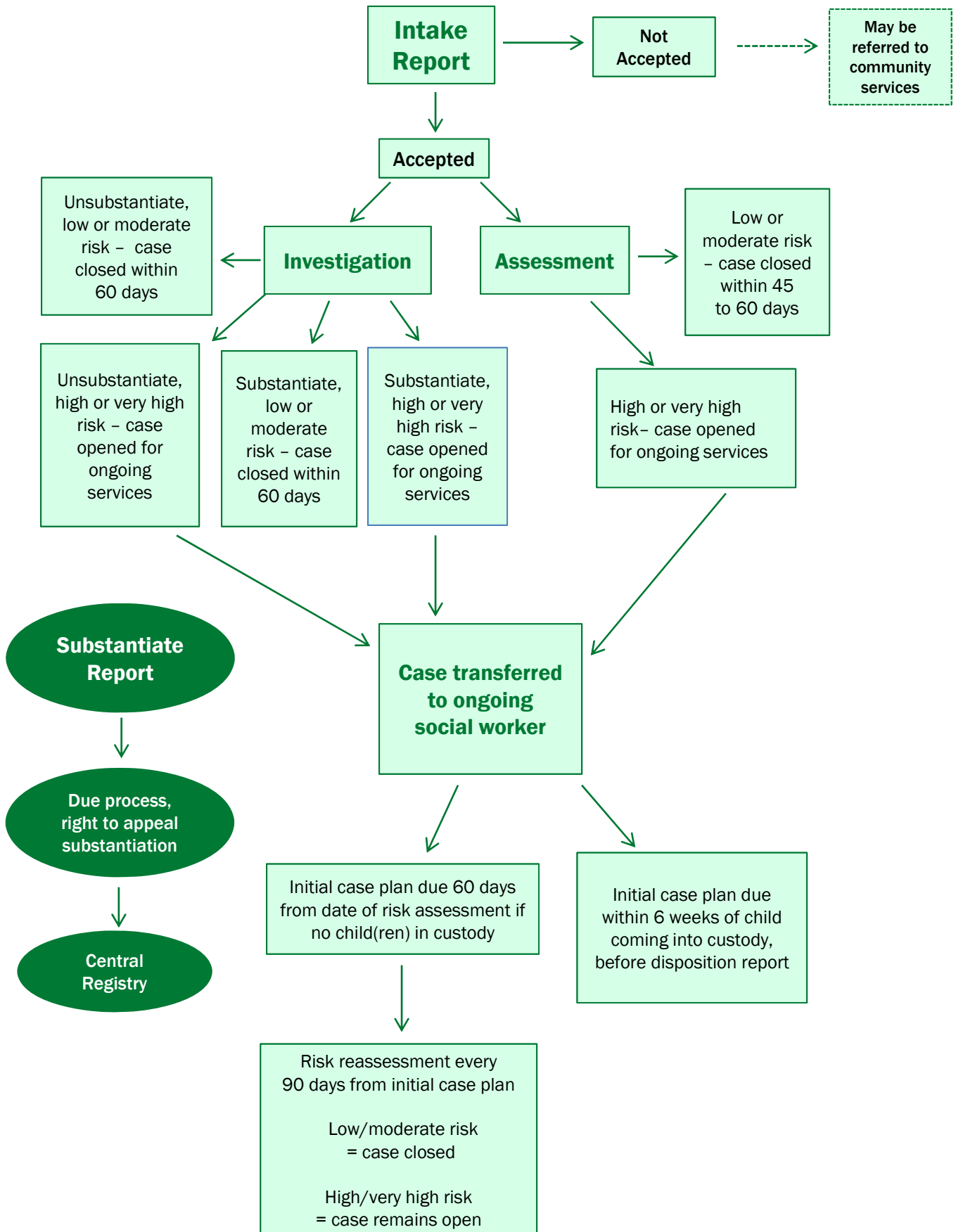
- ➔ Tell you where you are going and how to get there;
- ➔ Help you focus on the changes your family needs to make to prevent the need for out-of-home care for your child;
- ➔ Help you keep track of the progress being made and what's left to do; and
- ➔ Help you move beyond our involvement with your family.

Every 90 days from the date of the initial case plan, your social worker will conduct a *Risk Reassessment* to determine whether the risk has been reduced enough to close the case. If it's not sufficiently reduced after two risk reassessments, the social worker will discuss other possible approaches with his or her supervisor.

Tips for Parents

- ✓ No one knows your family better than you. Work with your social worker to identify your family's strengths, figure out what is causing the issues in your family, and decide what services and supports you need. *The case plan is your road map to moving forward!*
- ✓ Making progress on your case plan is important. Take advantage of the services and supports offered. Remember, the goal of the case plan is to strengthen your family, make your home safe, keep your child at home, and help you become the best parent you can be.

FSD Case Flowchart



Frequently-Asked Questions About Child Welfare

How is child abuse defined in Vermont law?

Vermont law (33.V.S.A. 49, § 4912) defines an abused or neglected child as:

An individual under 18 whose physical health, psychological growth and development or welfare is harmed, or is at substantial risk of harm, by the acts or omissions of his or her parent or other person responsible for the child's welfare. It also means a child who is sexually abused or at substantial risk of sexual abuse by any person.

-
- ➔ **Harm** can occur by abandonment, emotional maltreatment, neglect, physical injury, or sexual abuse.
 - ➔ **Risk of harm** means a significant danger that a child will suffer serious harm other than by accidental means, which would be likely to cause physical injury, neglect, emotional maltreatment, or sexual abuse.
-
- ➔ **Emotional Maltreatment:** A pattern of malicious behavior, which results in impaired psychological growth and development.
 - ➔ **Neglect:** Failure to supply a child with adequate food, clothing, shelter or health care.
 - ➔ **Physical Injury:** Death, permanent or temporary disfigurement, or impairment of any bodily organ or function other than by accidental means.
 - ➔ **Sexual Abuse:** Any act or acts by any person involving sexual molestation or exploitation of a child including but not limited to incest, prostitution, rape, sodomy, or any lewd and lascivious conduct involving a child. Sexual abuse also includes the aiding, abetting, counseling, hiring, or procuring of a child to perform or participate in any photograph, motion picture, exhibition, show, representation, or other presentation which, in whole or in part, depicts a sexual conduct, sexual excitement or sadomasochistic abuse involving a child.

When a report alleges sexual abuse or risk of sexual abuse, Vermont law allows DCF to intervene no matter the relationship between abuser and child. For all other types of abuse, the alleged abuser must be a person responsible for the child's welfare¹.

1. *Person responsible for the child's welfare includes the child's parent, guardian, foster parent, and any other adult residing in the child's home who serves in a parental role; an employee of a public or private residential home, institution or agency; or other person responsible for the child's welfare while in a residential, educational or child care setting, including any staff person.*

Who can make a report?

While anyone can report suspected child abuse and neglect, certain people are required by law to do so (33.V.S.A. 49, § 4913). Called *mandated reporters*, this includes:

- ➔ Chiropractors, dentists, emergency medical personnel, licensed practical nurses, medical examiners, mental health professionals, osteopaths, pharmacists, physicians, physician's assistants, psychologists, registered nurses, surgeons, or any other health care providers;
- ➔ Hospital administrators, interns, or resident physicians in any hospital in the state;
- ➔ School guidance counselors, librarians, principals, superintendents, teachers, or any other individuals regularly employed by school districts, or contracted and paid by school districts to provide student services for five or more hours a week during the school year;
- ➔ Child care workers, police officers, probation officers, social workers, members of the clergy;
- ➔ Residential and non-residential camp administrators, counselors, or owners; and
- ➔ Employees, contractors, or grantees of the Agency of Human Services who have contact with clients.

What happens if I am substantiated for child abuse or neglect?

If you are substantiated for child abuse or neglect, your name will be entered into Vermont's Child Protection Registry—a database of all substantiated reports of child abuse and neglect. In addition to your name, your registry record will include at least one other personal identifier, the date and nature of the finding, and a designated child protection level related to the risk of future harm to children.

You'll have the opportunity to request a review to challenge the substantiation before your name is placed on the Registry. DCF will send you a letter informing you about:

- ➔ Our intent to add your name to the Child Protection Registry; and
- ➔ Your right to request a review within 14 days of when the letter was mailed.

If you don't request a review within the time allowed, your name will be added to the Registry, the department's decision will be final, and you'll have no further right of review — until you are eligible to request a review to have your registry record expunged (*removed*) because you no longer present a risk to the safety or well-being of children.

Having a registry record may affect your ability to:

- ➔ Become a foster parent, adoptive parent, child care provider, or teacher;
- ➔ Work at a residential facility for children, youth, or vulnerable adults; and
- ➔ Be a volunteer, contractor, employee, or grantee who provides care, custody, treatment, transportation, or supervision of children, youth, or vulnerable adults.

For more information, ask the social worker for a copy of the Child Protection Registry brochure or go to http://dcf.vermont.gov/child_protection_registry.

Section 3: Youth Justice in Vermont

As Vermont's youth justice agency, we provide supports and services to two groups of youth and their families:

1. Youth who are at risk; and
2. Youth who are on juvenile probation.

Youth Who Are At Risk

Sometimes, youth come to our attention because they are putting themselves or others at risk. We might, for example, get a report alleging that a youth has:

- Been engaging in risky behaviors;
- Run away from home; or
- Been truant from school (*for at least 20 days*) without good reason.

While these types of reports may be made by anyone, including school staff, they are often made by the parents who are at their wit's end and don't know what to do. They have no control over their child and are requesting our help.

Based on Vermont law, Family Services will generally not get involved:

- Until the family has exhausted all other options for help.
- With youth between the ages of 16 and 17.5, unless they are at high risk of seriously harming themselves or others due to problems such as substance abuse, prostitution, or homelessness.

Before we get involved, we talk to the family about any local services they've already accessed and refer them to other potential sources of help in their communities. This could include a school, mental health provider, substance abuse treatment program, or local coordinated services team.

If we are able to get involved, we accept the report for assessment — a process that involves the social worker, youth, and family. Working together, we look at things like the youth's strengths and challenges, goals and priorities for changing behavior, and how the youth and family function as a system.

Depending on the assessed level of risk, the social worker may:

- Refer the family to services in their community;
- Provide services to the youth and family; and
- Petition the court for temporary DCF custody of the youth.

Youth Who Are On Juvenile Probation

When a youth is charged with breaking the law in Vermont, the matter is typically brought to Family Court Division as a delinquency case. If this happens to your child, here's what may happen:

1. Your child will get a notice to appear in court. It will include the date, time, and place that you and your child must show up at court (*unless the State's Attorney advises you in writing that you don't need to go to court*).
2. Prior to the first hearing, the court will mail you information about the court process along with the following paperwork:
 - a. A *Juvenile Petition*, in which the State's Attorney charges your child with a delinquent act;
 - b. An *Affidavit*, in which a police officer or other person tells their story about what your child allegedly did; and
 - c. An *Application for Public Defender Services* if you can't afford to hire a private lawyer for your child.
3. The State's Attorney may refer your child to Court Diversion before or after the first court hearing. *Diversion is an alternative to court for youth charged with delinquent acts.*
4. If the case moves forward through the court process, the judge may order Family Services to develop a *Disposition Case Plan* that describes:
 - a. The issues that brought your child to court;
 - b. An assessment of the impact of the delinquent act on the victim and community;
 - c. A description of your child's home, school, community, and current living situation;
 - d. An assessment of your child's medical, psychological, social, educational, and vocational needs;
 - e. An assessment of your child and family's strengths and risk factors;
 - f. Proposed conditions of probation that address the identified risks and provide for reparation to victims and the community;
 - g. A plan for services required to successfully complete probation; and
 - h. The responsibilities of the youth, family members, and department.
5. If your child admits to the allegations or the court finds your child to be delinquent, the judge may place your child on juvenile probation.
6. If your child is placed on probation a Family Services social worker may be assigned to work with your child to make sure he or she meets the conditions of probation. The judge could also refer your child to a community program that would allow him/her to follow the conditions set by the court without requiring supervision by Family Services. Sometimes, a youth's probation is supervised jointly by Family Services and the Department of Corrections. This is known as *youthful offender status*.

The purpose of juvenile probation is not to punish, but rather to have the youth accept responsibility, get help, and learn how to make better choices in the future.

Youth Assessments

If the court orders Family Services to develop a disposition plan for your child or to supervise your child's probation, a social worker will use the *Youth Assessment and Screening Instrument* (YASI™) to:

- ➔ Identify your child's strengths and challenges;
- ➔ Measure challenges and strengths (*risk and protective factors*);
- ➔ Establish goals and priorities for behavior change;
- ➔ Gain a clear understanding of how your child and family function as a system; and
- ➔ Develop a plan for services that address the relevant issues.

The assessment process involves:

- ➔ Conducting interviews with the youth, family, service providers, and others who know them; and
- ➔ Reviewing any written materials available, such as school reports and psychological evaluations.

Juvenile Probation Certificate

If your child is placed on probation, the court will issue a *Probation Certificate* that lists the duration of the probation and the conditions your child is required to meet. For example, the court may require your child to:

1. Perform community service for a specific number of hours;
2. Make amends to the victim (e.g., write a letter of apology and pay restitution);
3. Stay in Vermont unless granted permission to leave by the social worker;
4. Not go certain places and/or see certain people;
5. Live at home or other location specified by the court; and
6. Participate in services that are therapeutic, educational and/or vocational.

You are responsible for helping your child comply with these conditions. This might include, for example, driving your child to meetings and attending therapy together if it's recommended. If your child fails to meet the conditions of probation, he or she may have to go back to court, which could result in your child entering DCF custody and possible placement in a supervised setting like the Woodside Juvenile Rehabilitation Center.

Learn More About Our Work With Youth

To learn more about our work with youth, go to <http://dcf.vermont.gov/fsd/policies> and read the following policies:

- Policy 60: Juvenile Proceedings Act - CHINS(C) and (D) Assessments
- Policy 162: Violations of Juvenile Probation (Interim)
- Policy 164: Youthful Offender Status
- Policy 171: Woodside Admissions
- Policy 172: Woodside Short Term Program: Due Process Rights
- Policy 175: Drug Testing Youth
- Policy 179: Youth Risk Assessment

Frequently-Asked Questions About Youth Justice

How does the juvenile justice system differ from the adult criminal system?

The juvenile justice system takes a balanced approach that focuses on:

- Protecting the community from delinquency;
- Having youth take responsibility for their delinquent acts; and
- Helping them develop the skills they need to live productive, responsible lives.

Will my child be taken into DCF custody?

While the court may transfer custody of a youth to DCF or someone else (e.g., a non-custodial parent or extended family member) at any point during the process, juvenile probation supports the placement of youth in their own communities, usually with their families.

Court-ordered conditions and supervision by a Family Services social worker or contracted service provider help assure the needs of the youth, victim, and community are addressed. If the youth's needs or the risk to public safety cannot be addressed in their families, placement outside the home may be necessary and custody may be transferred to DCF.

Section 4: DCF Custody

This section will help you understand what will happen if your child comes into DCF custody.

Where Your Child Might Live

While in DCF custody, Family Services will decide where your child lives — with an emphasis on placing your child with relatives, friends, or someone else your child knows. Whenever possible, we'll place your child close to your home so it's easier to have time together (called *Family Time*).

Your child will most likely be placed in a foster home. This could be:

- ▶ ***In the home of a relative or family friend:***
Your child may live with relatives or friends who become licensed as foster parents. This is called *kinship foster care*. Your friends or relatives will be subject to the same licensing process as non-related foster families. This includes passing background checks and attending specialized training that teaches them how to care for children and youth in DCF custody.
- ▶ ***In the home of a non-related foster family:***
If there are no relatives or friends available or appropriate to care for your child, Family Services will place your child in a non-relative foster home.

Sometimes, a child needs a higher level of structure and supervision than a foster home can provide. Depending on your child's age and special needs, he or she could also be placed:

- ▶ ***In a staffed care setting:***
This could include, for example, a residential treatment center, psychiatric institution, or group home.

These settings:

- ➔ Provide group living situations with a high level of structure;
- ➔ Include both large and small programs;
- ➔ Are staffed 24-hours a day, seven days a week;
- ➔ May provide schooling on site or in the community; and
- ➔ Are of various lengths, depending on the treatment needs being addressed.

If your child was charged with committing, or found to have committed, a delinquent act, he or she may also be placed in the Woodside Juvenile Rehabilitation Center: Vermont's only locked juvenile treatment facility.

The Shared Parenting Meeting

Typically, within five working days of your child coming into DCF custody, the social worker will arrange a *Shared Parenting Meeting* to develop a plan for scheduled contact with your child (called *Family Time*). This meeting will include you, the social worker, your child's foster parents, and sometimes your child and other family members. If you'll be working with a *Family Time Coach*, he or she will typically attend.

During the meeting, you will:

1. Develop a plan for Family Time that benefits your child.
2. Talk about any safety concerns.
3. Write down all the decisions made, including:
 - ➔ Where *Family Time* will take place;
 - ➔ How often it will happen; and
 - ➔ Who will be there.
4. Share information about your child with the foster parents, including:
 - ➔ Your child's likes, dislikes, and routines;
 - ➔ People and things important to your child;
 - ➔ Any health issues they should know about; and
 - ➔ Your family's traditions and culture.

At the end of the meeting, everyone gets a copy of the plan.

The parenting meeting can help you:

- ➔ Get to know the foster parents who will be caring for your child;
- ➔ Develop a supportive, positive relationship with them; and
- ➔ Feel confident about your child's safety and well-being while in their care.

Studies show that when there is positive contact between birth parents and foster parents, children:

- Have more stable placements;
- Experience better emotional development;
- Are more successful in school; and
- Return home sooner.

Family Time

Family Time is scheduled contact between you and your child. It is one of the best ways to help your child cope with feelings of separation and loss associated with out-of-home placement. The goal is to have your first *Family Time* within three working days of your child entering DCF custody. You may get the opportunity to work with a *Family Time Coach* who can help you build your confidence as a parent and learn to better recognize and respond to your child's needs during *Family Time*.

The best way you can help your child is to:

- ✓ Attend regularly;
- ✓ Arrive on time;
- ✓ Tell your social worker ahead of time if you can't make *Family Time* so your child won't be expecting you; and
- ✓ Remain focused on your child's needs during *Family Time*.

What You & Your Child Might Experience

It's important to understand that *Family Time* might be a difficult and emotional experience for both you and your child.

- ➔ You may experience confusion, anger, and desperation, as well as feelings of incompetency, inadequacy, inferiority, or shame. You may feel judged and pressured to perform to often unknown expectations.
- ➔ Your child may experience conflicting feelings, which may lead to problem behaviors both during and after *Family Time*. For example: he or she might feel both happy and sad, anxious and relieved, angry and guilty. This may be expressed through behaviors such as hostility, clinginess, silence, tears, whyness, and ambivalence.

If you are concerned about your child's reaction to *Family Time*, talk to the *Family Time Coach*, social worker, or foster parents. And get support for yourself if you need it. Remember, these are normal feelings experienced by many children and parents.

Research has found that frequent, supported *Family Time* is strongly associated with successful family reunification and shorter out-of-home placement. Research also shows that children who are visited frequently are more likely to adjust well to being out of the home.

To learn more about *Family Time* and shared parenting meetings:

- Ask the social worker for a copy of the *Family Time Guidelines*; and
- Read Family Services Policy 124 - Planning With Children and Families: Family Time.

The Case Planning Process

The process of working with your family and service providers to achieve the goal of a safe and permanent home for your child is called *case planning*. Within the first six weeks of DCF custody, your social worker will work with you to develop an initial case plan for your child. It will outline:

- Why your child came into DCF custody;
- Your family's goals, challenges, strengths, and support systems;
- What changes you, your child, or both need to make;
- What supports and services you need from DCF and other service providers to help you make the needed changes;
- A plan for *Family Time*; and
- The goal of the case plan.

A team will be put in place to help you implement the plan, monitor your progress, and make any needed adjustments. In addition to you and your social worker, your team could also include:

- Extended family members;
- Other people who support you and your child such as a teacher or family friend;
- Your child if she or he is old enough; and
- Your child's foster parents.

Every six months, your social worker will invite the team members to a meeting, called a *case plan review*, to discuss the progress made, whether the goal needs to change, and if other supports need to be put in place for you or your child. A case reviewer who is not part of the team will facilitate the meeting. The facilitator's role is to make sure everyone understands the plan and everyone's opinions and concerns are heard.

Based on the group's discussion during the meeting, some changes may be made to the plan. If you disagree with parts of the case plan, the appeal process to handle such disagreements will be explained at the review.

When sufficient progress has been made on the case plan, DCF may recommend that your child return home and the case be closed; however, if it becomes clear that your child can't safely return home, the goal may be changed to looking for a permanent home for your child.

If you think that you are ready for your child to return home but your social worker doesn't agree, you may ask your lawyer to request a court hearing. If a judge decides that your child can go home, DCF must obey the judge's order.

The Ultimate Goal of State Care

The ultimate goal of state care is to provide children and youth with safe, permanent homes—ideally with their parents. That’s why, from a child’s first day in state care, the social worker works towards two goals at the same time (called *concurrent planning*):

1. To return the child home to the parents; and
2. To help the child secure another permanent placement —preferably with extended family members or known connections— if he or she cannot safely return home.

This means that while we work towards the child’s return home, we also make alternative plans in case that doesn’t happen. This allows us to achieve a timely outcome that respects a child’s need for stability. Living in uncertainty and moving between different living situations is disruptive to a child’s development and well-being.

The court will hold a Permanency Hearing to review your child's case plan once he or she has been in DCF custody for a year (sooner if the child is six or younger). The purpose is to review the progress made and plan for the future. At the conclusion of the hearing, the judge will order DCF to pursue one of the following options for achieving permanency:

1. Reunification:

The initial case plan goal is typically for the child to return home.

2. Adoption:

If your child cannot return home, the state will pursue adoption — first with people who have a connection to your child (e.g., relatives, friends, and the current foster parents) and then with other potential adoptive families. If your child is adopted, you will no longer have any legal rights to, or responsibilities for, the child once the adoption is finalized in court. It may be possible, however, for you to have some form of ongoing contact with the child if the adoptive parents agree. Post-adoption contact can be coordinated through the Vermont Adoption Registry, which is managed by DCF’s Family Services.

3. Permanent Guardianship:

If your child is not likely to be adopted within a reasonable period of time, we may pursue a permanent guardianship—a legal relationship created in Family Court Division— with a relative or family friend. The child must be at least 12 years old, unless the proposed guardian is a relative or permanent guardian for one of the child’s siblings. In a permanent guardianship, DCF is no longer involved; the guardian is responsible for the child’s day-to-day care, protection, and education; and the parents retain certain parental rights and responsibilities.

We are fully committed to helping you make your home safe for your child to return and to providing you with the support and services you need to make this happen. You must also make a commitment however: to do the work necessary for your child to return to your care and to do it quickly. Your child needs permanence and cannot wait indefinitely.

Frequently-Asked Questions About DCF Custody

What if I disagree with a case plan decision?

If you do not agree with certain decisions made while your child is in DCF custody, you may request a review. Simply put, a review is a formal way of taking another look at a decision that has been made.

It is always better to work out the disagreement with your social worker. However, if this is not possible, you may ask for a formal review of the following decisions:

1. The living arrangements for your child;
2. The plan for *Family Time*; and
3. The long-term goal for your child such as returning home or being adopted.

To request a review, write to the district director of the Family Services office you are working with. Your letter must be received no later than five days after you were informed about the decision in question.

Be sure to include the following:

- The decision you disagree with;
- Who made the decision;
- The decision you propose instead;
- The efforts you've made to resolve the situation;
- Your relationship to the child; and
- Your name, address, and daytime telephone number.

The district director will contact you to set up a meeting. Following the meeting, you will be informed, in writing, of:

- The decision made;
- The reasons for the decision; and
- Any options you have for further review.

We will not review decisions already made by a court or those scheduled to be heard in court within 30 days

Section 5: The Court Process

Please see the flowchart on page 31 for a visual overview of the court process.

Court Hearings That May Occur

Following are brief descriptions of the court hearings that may occur.

If the case begins as an emergency:

► **Emergency Care Hearing**

Children may be taken into emergency custody if they are in immediate danger, have run away, or been arrested. Parents may not know about an *Emergency Care Hearing* beforehand as it happens quickly, day or night, in response to an emergency. The hearing takes place with a judge, either by phone or at court. An order for emergency care is followed by a *Temporary Care Hearing* within 72 hours. During this time, the child could be temporarily placed in foster care and the Family Services social worker gathers information to present to the judge at the next court hearing.

► **Temporary Care Hearing**

The judge decides who should have temporary custody of the child/youth until the next hearing. All parties involved, including you the parents, DCF, the State's Attorney, and the child have the opportunity to voice their opinions. The judge will consider placing the child back home or with a non-custodial parent, relative, or family friend – in that order. The judge may also continue custody with DCF.

If the case begins as a non-emergency:

► **Preliminary Hearing**

If the case does not begin as an emergency, it usually starts with a Preliminary Hearing — held within 15 days of the State's Attorney filing a petition with the court. The judge will review the information presented in the petition and hear from the parties. The next hearing is typically a *Pre-Trial Hearing*.

The next steps in the court process:

► **Pre-Trial Hearing (most frequently used for delinquency cases)**

This hearing is held about 15 days after either the *Temporary Care Hearing* or *Preliminary Hearing*. The purpose is to discuss whether the allegations (*accusations*) in the petition will be admitted to or denied. This is an important decision because it affects what happens with the rest of the case. If the allegations are admitted to, it is called reaching the “merits” of the case and the next step is the *Disposition Hearing*. If the allegations are denied, the next step is the *Merits Hearing*.

► **Status Conference**

A *Status Conference* is a court hearing that allows the judge and other parties to hear what is going on with the case. It may be held at any stage of the case.

► **Merits Hearing**

The *Merits Hearing* is similar to a trial. The case is presented to a judge. There is no jury. Witnesses may be called to testify under oath. Testimony may be presented by family members, teachers, doctors, mental health providers, friends, witnesses, police officers, social workers, foster parents, the child/youth, and others.

After listening to the evidence, the judge may:

1. Dismiss the case; or
2. Issue one of the following findings:
 - *CHINS A* – the child has been abandoned or abused by his/her parents, guardian, or other custodian.
 - *CHINS B* – the child is without proper parental care or subsistence, education, medical, or other care necessary for his/her well-being.
 - *CHINS C* – the child is without or beyond the control of his/her parents, guardian, or other custodian.
 - *CHINS D* – the child is habitually and without justification truant from compulsory school attendance.
 - *Delinquency* – A child over the age of ten has been adjudicated for committing a delinquent act.

If the judge finds the child is in need of care or supervision (*CHINS*) or the youth is delinquent, the judge will order Family Services to prepare a *disposition case plan*. The *Disposition Hearing* should be held within 35 days.

► **Disposition Hearing**

The plan for the child/youth and family will be decided at this hearing. All parties will receive a copy of the *disposition case plan* before the hearing and have the opportunity to voice their opinions at the hearing. The judge will either accept or reject the case plan and make a final decision about custody at this hearing.

► **Post-Disposition Review**

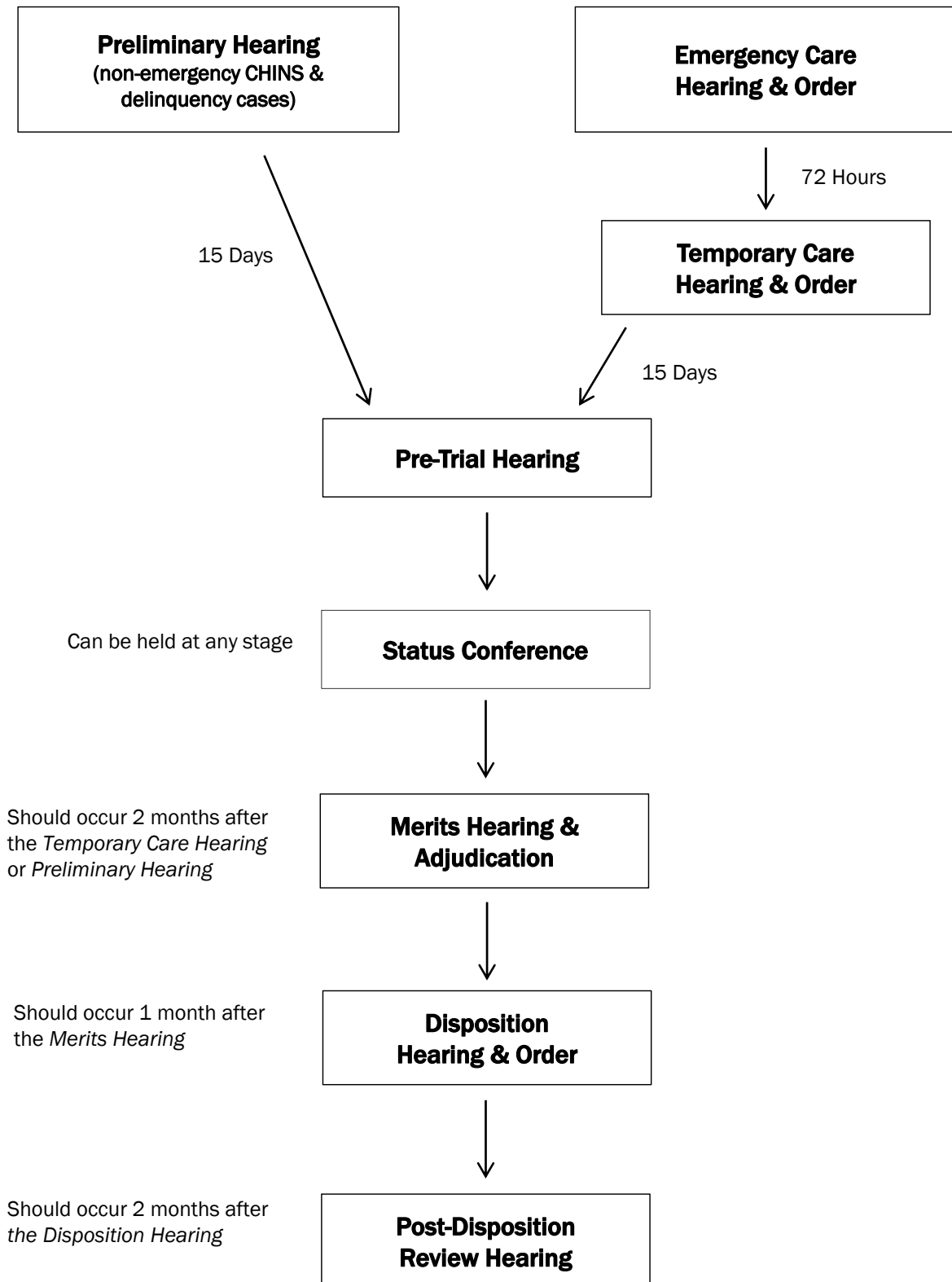
If your child is in DCF custody, the judge will hold a *Post-Disposition Review* within 60 days to check on the progress that you and your child are making.

For more information about the court proceedings, read the following materials, which are available at court or online at <http://www.vermontjudiciary.org/GTC/Family/Juvenile.aspx>.

- Guide for Parents in "CHINS" Cases: What to Expect from Your Lawyer and the Court;
- Youth in "CHINS" Cases: Understanding the Court Process; and
- Juvenile Delinquency Proceedings Pamphlet.

Juvenile Proceedings Flowchart

(Not all cases will follow this progression)



Frequently-Asked Questions About The Court Process

Who represents my child at court?

The court will appoint a lawyer to represent your child's interests at court. The court will also appoint a Guardian ad Litem to support your child during court proceedings. A Guardian ad Litem is a responsible adult who has been trained to work with children in state custody. He/she will attend all court hearings to advocate for what is in your child's best interest.

Do I need my own lawyer?

If your child is in DCF custody because of alleged abuse or neglect on your part, it is advisable (though not mandatory) to have a lawyer to speak on your behalf and help you navigate the court process, which can be complex. If you can't afford to hire a private lawyer, you may be entitled to a court-appointed one (but you may have a copay).

Can I speak freely to my lawyer?

Everything you say to your lawyer is "confidential." This means your lawyer can't tell other people what you say without your permission. There is one important exception however: Your lawyer may tell other people if he or she believes that it's necessary to stop a crime that could lead to someone's death or injury.

Who else will be at the court hearings?

The people listed below are always parties to the case, which means they have the right to present evidence and call witnesses:

- The judge;
- The State's Attorney (an attorney who represents the state);
- The Family Services social worker;
- The child's Guardian ad Litem;
- The parents;
- The children; and
- The attorneys representing both the parents and the children.

The judge may also grant party status to others such as a relative.

Will I be notified about court hearings?

Yes. You will be given advance notice of hearings. Notices are sent to the lawyers and to any party to the case who does not have a lawyer. Always let your lawyer, social worker, and the court know if your phone number or address changes.

What if I can't make a court hearing?

You or your lawyer may ask the court, in writing, to move the hearing to another date. The judge may grant the request if you have a good reason for not being able to make the original date. If the hearing date is changed, all parties will be notified (in writing if there's enough time).

Section 6: Your Rights & Responsibilities

Your Rights	Your Responsibilities
<p>You have the right to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Know why your family is involved with FSD. ✓ Know the nature of any report made concerning your family (although not the name of the reporter, unless the case goes to court). ✓ Know the outcome of any assessment or investigation. ✓ Be treated respectfully by FSD staff and the service providers we contract with. ✓ Not be discriminated against based on disability, age, race, gender, religion, ethnic origin, economic status, or sexual orientation. ✓ Have your phone calls returned in a timely fashion (<i>typically within two working days</i>). ✓ Speak to your social worker right away in an emergency or another employee if your social worker is unavailable. ✓ Share your concerns with us, about decisions we've made, actions we've taken, or the way you've been treated. ✓ The services of an interpreter if English is not your first language and you need help understanding what is going on. ✓ Reasonable accommodations if you have a disability. 	<p>You are expected to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Inform your social worker right away if your child is of Native American heritage. We need to know up front if the federal Indian Child Welfare Act applies. ✓ Keep all appointments with your social worker. ✓ Return phone calls from your worker and other service providers promptly. ✓ Treat the social worker and everyone else you work with (e.g., foster parents, service providers, and court staff) with courtesy and respect. ✓ Provide your social worker with information about your progress and any changes in your life, including changes to your address, phone number, job, or living situation. ✓ Bring your child to see a doctor, therapist or other professional if the social worker asks you to. ✓ Let us know if you need special accommodations because of a disability or an interpreter because of limited English proficiency.

Your Rights	Your Responsibilities
<p>Related to Plan Development You have the right to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Be involved in the development of all plans related to your family. ✓ Get written copies of all agreed upon plans and be informed of any changes. ✓ Get the plans in your first language if your first language is not English. ✓ Be kept informed about what you and/or your child need to do. ✓ Be referred to the services described in the plan and informed of any services your child receives. ✓ Ask your social worker to coordinate your plan with any other plans you or your child are involved in. <p>Related to the Court Process You have the right to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Be present and have your say at all court hearings. ✓ Bring witnesses to all court hearings. ✓ Have a lawyer represent you at court. ✓ Be treated in a respectful manner by all parties in court. ✓ Be notified of court hearings related to your case. ✓ Have your questions answered. 	<p>Related to Plan Development You are expected to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Actively engage in the development of plans related to your family. ✓ Provide your worker with contact information for relatives, friends, and others you'd like to invite to participate in the development of these plans. ✓ Follow through with your part of the plans, including participating in recommended services and keeping all appointments you have agreed to. ✓ Keep your worker informed about your progress on action items in your plan. ✓ Ask your social worker for help if you are having difficulties carrying out your part of the plan. <p>Related to the Court Process You are expected to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Attend and participate in all the hearings related to your case, unless your lawyer tells you not to. ✓ Behave respectfully at court. ✓ Let the court and your lawyer know how you can be reached. ✓ Connect with your lawyer before each court hearing. ✓ Cooperate fully with your lawyer.

Your Rights	Your Responsibilities
<p>Related to Out-of-Home Placement You have the right to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Know why your child is in out-of-home placement. ✓ Know exactly what needs to happen for your child to return home. ✓ In most cases, meet the people who will be caring for your child. ✓ Develop a plan for scheduled contact with your child (called <i>Family Time</i>). ✓ Be informed about your child's progress and issues while in state care. ✓ Be informed promptly if your child is moved. ✓ Be consulted about things such as your child's health and education. ✓ Be informed about the people and/or services involved with your child such as the school, teacher, doctor, and dentist. ✓ Be informed about any emergency medical care your child required. ✓ Be referred to the services and supports needed to have your child return home. ✓ Have your child return home if/when you successfully meet the goals of your case plan. 	<p>Related to Out-of-Home Placement You are expected to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Provide your social worker with information about the child's other parent and any relatives or friends who may be able and willing to safely care for your child. ✓ Tell your social worker about people who are important to your child. ✓ Share information about your child and family's medical histories so we can provide the best care for your child. ✓ Share important information about your child (e.g., likes, dislikes, and routines) with your child's caregivers. ✓ Attend <i>Family Time</i> as planned, arrive on time & ready to fully participate, and tell your social worker ahead of time if you can't make it. ✓ Inform the social worker about any concerns you have with your child's placement. ✓ Do your part to help your child return home if that's the goal. ✓ Talk with your social worker about your child's needs and progress. ✓ Make child support payments if the court orders you to do so.

Your Rights	What You Can Expect
<p>When A Social Worker Visits Your Home You have the right to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Ask to see a <i>State Employee Identification Card</i> before letting a worker into your home; ✓ Call the appropriate Family Services Division (FSD) office to confirm the worker's identity; ✓ Ask questions if you don't understand what the worker is doing or asking you to do; ✓ Say no and then ask to speak to the worker's supervisor if you are uncomfortable with what you're being asked to do; ✓ Ask to see a court order if the worker wants to remove your child from your home; and ✓ Call 911 or local police if you suspect the person is impersonating an FSD social worker. 	<p>When A Social Worker Visits Your Home You can expect the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ If the worker is required to tour your home, he or she will ask you for permission. If you are not comfortable with this, the worker will talk to you about possible next steps. ✓ The worker may ask you questions about extended family members, friends, and others who may be able to help and support you. ✓ The worker may ask that a piece of the child's clothing be moved or removed to see a bruise or physical injury on the child. This will be done in the presence of another adult. The worker may ask that you take the child to see a doctor. ✓ The worker may want to talk privately with your child about how things are going. The worker <i>does not</i> have to be alone with your child. They may, for example, sit on the porch or somewhere else where you can see your child while not overhearing the conversation.

Frequently-Asked Question About Rights & Responsibilities

What if I have a complaint?

If you have a complaint about a decision we've made, an action we've taken, the lack of action on our part, or the way you've been treated, we want to know about it.

1. The first step you should always take is to talk to the employee involved;
2. If you don't feel comfortable talking to this person or are unhappy with his or her response, contact the supervisor;
3. If the issue is still not settled, call or write the district director of the Family Services office you are working with; and
4. If the issue is still not resolved, call our central office at (802) 241-2131. A staff person will hear your complaint and inform you of the next steps you can take.

Section 7: Resources That Can Help

This section includes information about resources that can help your family beyond the involvement of the Family Services Division.

Basic Needs

CHILD CARE SERVICES THROUGH DCF'S CHILD DEVELOPMENT DIVISION (CDD)

WEBSITE: dcf.vermont.gov/cdd/cccsa

TELEPHONE: 1-800-649-2642

DESCRIPTION:

CDD administers two programs that can help you find and pay for child care.

1. The *Child Care Financial Assistance Program* can help cover part of the cost of child care if you have an accepted reason for child care and meet current income guidelines.
2. The *Child Care Referral Service* can help you find a child care provider or program.

Both programs are delivered through Community Child Care Support Agencies located throughout the state. Your local agency can give you information about the child care options in your area and help you apply for financial assistance.

CHILD SUPPORT THROUGH DCF'S OFFICE OF CHILD SUPPORT (OCS)

WEBSITE: dcf.vermont.gov/ocs

TELEPHONE: 1-800-786-3214

DESCRIPTION:

OCS is the state agency responsible for establishing, collecting on, enforcing, and modifying support orders for children who don't live with both parents. Services are available to custodial and non-custodial parents as well as to guardians of children who are under 18 or still in high school. For more information about available services, call our toll-free helpline, visit our website, or contact your regional office.

- ➔ CENTRAL REGION - *Essex, Orange and Washington Counties*
162 North Main St., Barre, VT 05641 - (802) 479-4204
- ➔ NORTHEAST REGION - *Caledonia, Lamoille, and Orleans Counties*
1153 Main St, Ste 2, St. Johnsbury, VT 05819 - (802) 751-2650
- ➔ NORTHWEST REGION - *Chittenden, Franklin, and Grand Isle Counties*
32 Cherry St., Ste 310, Burlington, VT 05401 - (802) 863-7444
- ➔ SOUTHEAST REGION - *Windham and Windsor Counties*
100 Mineral St., Ste 202, Springfield, VT 05156 - (802) 885-6212
- ➔ SOUTHWEST REGION - *Addison, Bennington and Rutland Counties*
420 Asa Bloomer Bldg, Rutland, VT 05701 - (802) 786-5060

COMMUNITY ACTION AGENCIES

DESCRIPTION:

These agencies help lower-income Vermonters with their basic needs for things like food, fuel, housing, and more.

- ➔ CENTRAL VT COMMUNITY ACTION COUNCIL (CVCAC) - 1-800-639-1053, www.cvcac.org
- ➔ CHAMPLAIN VALLEY OFFICE OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY (CVOEO) - www.cvoeo.org
 - ⇒ Addison Community Action - 1-800-639-2318, (802) 388-2285
 - ⇒ Chittenden Community Action - (802) 863-6248
 - ⇒ Franklin/Grand Isle Community Action - 1-800-300-7392, (802) 527-7392
- ➔ COMMUNITY ACTION IN SW VERMONT (BROC) - 1-800-717-2762, www.broc.org
- ➔ NORTHEAST KINGDOM COMMUNITY ACTION (NEKCA) - (802) 334-7316, www.nekcavt.org
- ➔ SOUTHEASTERN VT COMMUNITY ACTION (SEVCA) - 1-800-464-9951, www.sevca.org

ECONOMIC BENEFITS THROUGH DCF'S ECONOMIC SERVICES DIVISION (ESD)

WEBSITE: mybenefits.vt.gov

TELEPHONE: 1-800-479-6151

DESCRIPTION:

ESD administers several benefit programs that can help families meet their basic needs. This includes 3SquaresVT, Emergency Assistance, Energy Assistance, Fuel Assistance, Phone Assistance, and Reach Up. Eligibility for most of these programs is based on the family or household's income (and additional criteria in some cases). To learn more and to apply, go to the mybenefits website, call our statewide toll free number, or visit an ESD District Office.

- ➔ BARRE DISTRICT - 5 Perry Street, Suite 150, Barre, VT
- ➔ BENNINGTON DISTRICT - 200 Veteran's Memorial Drive, Suite 6, Bennington, VT
- ➔ BRATTLEBORO DISTRICT - 232 Main Street, 2nd Floor, Brattleboro, VT
- ➔ BURLINGTON DISTRICT - 119 Pearl Street, John Zampieri Building, Burlington, VT
- ➔ HARTFORD DISTRICT - 224 Holiday Drive, Suite A, White River Junction, VT
- ➔ MIDDLEBURY DISTRICT - 156 South Village Green, Suite 201, Middlebury, VT
- ➔ MORRISVILLE DISTRICT - 63 Professional Drive, Suite 4, Morrisville, VT
- ➔ NEWPORT DISTRICT - 100 Main Street, Suite 240, Newport, VT
- ➔ RUTLAND DISTRICT - 320 Asa Bloomer Building, 88 Merchants Row, Rutland, VT
- ➔ SPRINGFIELD DISTRICT - 100 Mineral Street, Suite 201, Springfield, VT
- ➔ ST. ALBANS DISTRICT - 20 Houghton Street, Room 313, St. Albans, VT
- ➔ ST. JOHNSBURY DISTRICT - 67 Eastern Avenue, Suite 7, St. Johnsbury, VT

NUTRITION PROGRAM FOR WOMEN, INFANTS, & CHILDREN (WIC)

WEBSITE: www.healthvermont.gov/wic/index.aspx

TELEPHONE: 1-800-649-4357

DESCRIPTION:

The Department of Health administers WIC, which helps pregnant women, new mothers, and children up to age 5 to eat well and stay healthy. Fathers may apply for the children in their care. If you are eligible to get WIC, a driver will deliver food to your home twice a month (e.g., milk, juice, eggs, whole grain bread, and peanut butter). You'll also get a WIC card with a small monthly benefit that allows you to buy fruits and vegetables at authorized grocers.

- ➔ BARRE: (802) 479-4200, 1-888-253-8786,
- ➔ BENNINGTON: (802) 447-3531, 1-800-637-7347
- ➔ BRATTLEBORO: (802) 257-2880, 1-888-253-8805
- ➔ BURLINGTON: (802) 863-7323, 1-888-253-8803
- ➔ MIDDLEBURY: (802) 388-4644, 1-888-253-8804
- ➔ MORRISVILLE: (802) 888-7447, 1-888-253-8798
- ➔ NEWPORT: (802) 334-6707, 1-800-952-2945
- ➔ RUTLAND: (802) 786-5811, 1-888-253-8802
- ➔ ST. ALBANS: (802) 524-7970, 1-888-253-8801
- ➔ ST. JOHNSBURY: (802) 748-5151, 1-800-952-2936
- ➔ SPRINGFIELD: (802) 885-5778, 1-888-296-8151
- ➔ WHITE RIVER JUNCTION: (802) 295-8820, 1-888-253-8799

VERMONT 2-1-1

WEBSITE: www.vermont211.org

TELEPHONE: 2-1-1

DESCRIPTION: Dial 2-1-1 toll free from anywhere in Vermont to find out about hundreds of community resources, such as emergency food and shelter, disability services, counseling, senior services, healthcare, child care, drug and alcohol programs, legal assistance, transportation needs, educational and volunteer opportunities, and much more. The full 2-1-1 database can also be accessed on their website.

VERMONT FOODBANK

WEBSITE: www.vtfoodbank.org

TELEPHONE: 1-800-585-2265

DESCRIPTION: There are hundreds of food shelves and meal sites around Vermont. Visit the website listed above or call the toll free number to find a food shelf or meal site in your area.

Health & Mental Health

VERMONT DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH - DIVISION OF ALCOHOL AND DRUG ABUSE PROGRAMS

WEBSITE: www.healthvermont.gov/adap/adap.aspx

TELEPHONE: (802) 651-1550

DESCRIPTION:

This site includes a list of approved Vermont substance abuse treatment programs as well as links to treatment, prevention, recovery and education resources.

VERMONT DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH

WEBSITE: www.mentalhealth.vermont.gov

TELEPHONE: (802) 828-3824, 1-888-212-4677

DESCRIPTION:

The Department of Mental Health provides services to adults, children, adolescents, and families, including help for people in crisis, family support, outreach treatment, and prevention and referral services. Direct services are provided by private, non-profit service providers, called *Designated Agencies*, located throughout the state. The website includes a comprehensive list of local mental health agencies, a list of local resources and statewide organizations, and links to helpful publications.

VERMONT HEALTH CONNECT

WEBSITE: www.healthconnect.vt.gov

TELEPHONE: 1-855-899-9600

DESCRIPTION:

Vermont Health Connect is *the* place in Vermont for individuals, families and small businesses to compare health plans and select the ones that best fit their needs and budgets. It includes both public healthcare plans such as Dr. Dynasaur and Medicaid as well as private healthcare plans. Every plan offered through the exchange offers basic services such as checkups, emergency care, mental health services and prescriptions.

Housing Assistance

VERMONT STATE HOUSING AUTHORITY

WEBSITE: www.vsha.org

TELEPHONE: (802) 828-3295

DESCRIPTION:

Provides critical housing assistance to Vermonters in need. Their affordable housing initiatives reach many Vermonters, including senior citizens, young families, those who are homeless and those with special needs to residents of mobile home parks. Visit their website to see the housing opportunities and services they provide.

Legal Resources

SOUTH ROYALTON LEGAL CLINIC

WEBSITE: www.vermontlaw.edu/

TELEPHONE: (802) 831-1500

DESCRIPTION:

Helps residents from several Vermont counties who can't afford lawyers with issues such as child support, children's rights, divorce, family law, guardianships, housing, welfare and more.

The Prisoner Child Support Project helps prisoners modify their child support orders so they don't leave prison owing thousands of dollars in support payments.

VERMONT BAR ASSOCIATION'S ONLINE LAWYER REFERRAL SERVICE

WEBSITE: www.vtbar.org

TELEPHONE: 1-800-639-7036

DESCRIPTION:

Provides free referrals to Vermonter. Lawyers provide an initial 30-minute office consultation for no more than \$25. Simply provide information about you and your legal needs and you'll be matched with a qualified lawyer.

VERMONT LAW HELP

WEBSITE: www.vtlawhelp.org

DESCRIPTION:

Easy-to-read legal information on topics such as public benefits, education, and free legal services.

VERMONT LEGAL AID

WEBSITE: www.vtlegalaid.org

TELEPHONE: 1-800-889-2047

DESCRIPTION:

Vermont Legal Aid provides free civil legal services to Vermonter throughout the state who are low-income, elderly or have disabilities. VLA provides information, advice and representation in the areas of health care, housing, education, family law, benefits, and consumer law.

Other Assistance

AFFORDABLE INTERNET SERVICE THROUGH COMCAST

WEBSITE: www.internetessentials.com

TELEPHONE: 1-855-846-8376

DESCRIPTION:

You may qualify for affordable Internet service and a low-cost computer if your household:

- ➔ Is in an area where Comcast offers Internet service;
- ➔ Has at least one child eligible to participate in the National School Lunch Program;
- ➔ Has not subscribed to Comcast Internet service within the last 90 days; and
- ➔ Does not have an overdue Comcast bill or unreturned equipment.

VERMONT JUDICIARY

WEBSITE: www.vermontjudiciary.org

TELEPHONE: (802) 828-3278

DESCRIPTION:

The Vermont Judiciary encompasses the state government legal system, including the Vermont Supreme Court, as well as local criminal, civil, probate and family divisions. Visit their website for a list of all the courts, with addresses, phone numbers and contact information as well as links to forms, publications, frequently-asked questions and other resources.

VERMONT NETWORK AGAINST DOMESTIC & SEXUAL VIOLENCE

WEBSITE: www.vtnetwork.org/

TELEPHONE: Domestic Violence: 1-800-228-7395; Sexual Violence: 1-800-489-7273

DESCRIPTION:

The network is a coalition of domestic and sexual violence programs located throughout the state. Network staff support these programs through training, technical assistance and capacity building.

Parenting Resources

CHILDREN'S INTEGRATED SERVICES THROUGH DCF'S CHILD DEVELOPMENT DIVISION (CDD)

WEBSITE: dcf.vermont.gov/cdd/cis

TELEPHONE: 1-800-649-2642

DESCRIPTION:

DCF's Child Development Division administers Children's Integrated Services (CIS) — a resource for families who have questions or concerns about their children's development.

CIS can help:

- ➔ Pregnant women who have questions or concerns about conditions or risk situations that may impact their babies' health or safety;
- ➔ Families who need help providing stable, healthy environments for children; and
- ➔ Parents of children age 6 or younger who have questions or concerns about suspected developmental delays or conditions.

To find out more about CIS services:

1. Dial 2-1-1 toll free from anywhere in Vermont. Ask the operator for the name and phone number of your local CIS Coordinator.
2. The Coordinator will discuss your concerns, the help you are seeking, and possible next steps. If CIS seem right for your family, your local team will help you develop an action plan; provide resources and services and/or referrals; and help you access other programs and community services. *CIS teams have expertise in social work, family support, maternal & child health, nursing, child development & early intervention, early childhood and family mental health, child care, and other specialties such as nutrition and speech therapy.*

KIDS VT

WEBSITE: www.kidsvt.com

DESCRIPTION:

Kids VT is Vermont's only parenting magazine, a reliable resource for family-friendly events, activities, camps and classes. This free, monthly magazine is available at more than 400 locations in northern and central Vermont. The website is a great resource for parents, with county-by-county information on events, playgroups, classes, summer camps and activities for children and families.

PARENT CHILD CENTERS

WEBSITE: www.dcf.vermont.gov/cdd/contact_us/pcc

DESCRIPTION:

A network of centers located throughout Vermont that help families make sure children get off to a healthy start. Services include early childhood services, home visits to families with young children, playgroups, parent education, parent support, and information & referral. Visit the website listed above or dial 2-1-1 to find your local parent child center.

PREVENT CHILD ABUSE VERMONT (PCAV)

WEBSITE: www.pcavt.org

TELEPHONE: (802) 229-5724, 1-800-244-5373 (Parent's Stress Line)

DESCRIPTION:

Offers statewide education programs for parents, children, and teens; hosts parent support groups; and publishes the *Annual Vermont Parent's Home Companion and Resource Directory*.

VERMONT HEAD START ASSOCIATION

WEBSITE: www.vermontheadstart.org

DESCRIPTION:

Provides a range of comprehensive early education, health, nutrition, parental involvement/engagement, and family support services to primarily at-risk children from birth to age 5 and their families. Visit the website listed above to find your local provider or dial 2-1-1.

VERMONT FAMILY NETWORK (VFN)

WEBSITE: www.vermontfamilynetwork.org

TELEPHONE: 1-800-800-4005

DESCRIPTION:

Provides families of children and young adults with special needs and learning difficulties, information and support regarding their children's disabilities, education, health, and mental health.

VERMONT FEDERATION OF FAMILIES FOR CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH

WEBSITE: <http://www.vffcmh.org/>

TELEPHONE: (802) 876-7021, 1-800-639-6071

DESCRIPTION:

Provides support, information, and assistance to families who have children experiencing emotional, behavioral, or mental health challenges.

VERMONT'S FIND AND GO SEEK

WEBSITE: www.findandgoseek.net

DESCRIPTION:

A fun and easy way to search, discover and talk about fun things to do with your children. It also offers tips from other parents and caregivers that can help you save time and money.

Resources and Literature

PREVENT CHILD ABUSE VERMONT – PARENT'S HOME COMPANION & RESOURCE DIRECTORY

WEBSITE: www.pcavt.org/index.php?id=323

TELEPHONE: 1-800-244-5373

DESCRIPTION:

This comprehensive guide includes parenting advice on a vast scope of everyday parenting issues as well as statewide and county-by-county resources.

UNITED WAY – COMMUNITY RESOURCE DIRECTORIES

► *Green Mountain United Way*

<http://www.gmunitedway.org/content/pdf/CommunityResources.pdf>

Go to the link above to download and print the Central Vermont Resource Guide.

► *Franklin-Grand Isle United Way*

<http://www.fgiunitedway.org>

Call (802) 527-7418 to request a copy of their Resource Directory or get it on their website.

► *Rutland County United Way*

<http://www.uwrutlandcounty.org/uwrc-brochure.pdf>

Download their brochure, which lists many community resources.

► *Windham County United Way*

http://www.unitedwaywindham.org/get_help.shtml

Visit their website to download and print helpful resource guides.

VERMONT FATHERHOOD RESOURCE GUIDE

WEBSITE: http://dcf.vermont.gov/sites/dcf/files/pdf/fsd/VT_Fatherhood_Guide.pdf

DESCRIPTION:

Produced by the Department for Children and Families, this guide connects Vermont fathers to national, statewide, and community-based resources that can support them in their roles as fathers, parents, and providers. Having access to these supports and services can make a critical difference in their families' lives.

Work Supports

VERMONT DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

WEBSITE: www.labor.vermont.gov

TELEPHONE: (802) 828-4000

DESCRIPTION:

The Department of Labor offers a full array of services to people who are unemployed and seeking work. For help finding a job, go to www.vermontjoblink.com or visit one of their resource centers.

The resource centers offer job seekers a resource room with access to personal computers, the internet, educational resources, information on employers, and more.

- ➔ BARRE - (802) 476-2600
- ➔ BENNINGTON - (802) 442-6376
- ➔ BRATTLEBORO - (802) 254-4555
- ➔ BURLINGTON - (802) 863-7676
- ➔ MIDDLEBURY - (802) 388-4921
- ➔ MORRISVILLE - (802) 888-4545
- ➔ NEWPORT - (802) 334-6545
- ➔ RUTLAND - (802) 786-5837
- ➔ SPRINGFIELD - (802) 885-2167
- ➔ ST. ALBANS - (802) 524-6585
- ➔ ST. JOHNSBURY - (802) 748-3177
- ➔ WHITE RIVER JUNCTION - (802) 295-8805

VOC REHAB VERMONT

WEBSITE: vocrehab.vermont.gov

TELEPHONE: 1-866-879-6757

DESCRIPTION:

VocRehab helps Vermonters who have disabilities to become or to remain employed. Before receiving services from VocRehab, a counselor determines eligibility for the program. Any Vermonter may be eligible for VocRehab services who:

- ➔ Has a disability that is a barrier to work; and
- ➔ Requires VocRehab services to become or remain employed.

Youth Services & Supports

RESOURCES FOR YOUTH ON THE DCF WEBSITE

WEBSITE: <http://dcf.vermont.gov/fsd/resources/youth>

DESCRIPTION:

Links to helpful resources for youth in Vermont, housed on the Department for Children and Families website.

VERMONT CENTER FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES

WEBSITE: <http://www.uvm.edu/medicine/vccyf/?Page=resources.html>

DESCRIPTION:

The Vermont Center for Children, Youth, and Families is housed within UVM's Department of Psychiatry. Their Community Resources Guide lists resources available throughout the state, including mental health treatment programs, advocacy and support programs, drug and alcohol treatment programs, inpatient mental health treatment, outpatient therapeutic groups, and more.

VERMONT COALITION OF RUNAWAY AND HOMELESS YOUTH PROGRAMS

WEBSITE: <http://www.vcrhyp.org/>

TELEPHONE: (802) 229-9151

DESCRIPTION:

VCRHYP is a coalition of 13 service providers throughout the state of Vermont who provide a host of services and supports to youth. This includes emergency shelter, food, clothing, crisis stabilization, transitional housing, mental health care, access to community resources, substance abuse assessment and treatment, peer support systems, youth leadership opportunities and more. Each Coalition member is part of a closely-knit team that comes together regularly, where the wisdom and experience of all members are recognized as our greatest asset.

YOUTH IN TRANSITION GRANT

WEBSITE: <http://www.youth-in-transition-grant.com/>

DESCRIPTION: The Youth in Transition Grant is a six-year project to improve Vermont's system of care for youth and young adults ages 16 through 21. Visit their *Regions & Communities Page* to find support in your area. Check out the *Events Page* for a list of current YIT-sponsored activities. View the *Links and Resources Page* to link to external resources for young adults and schools.

Essential Phone Numbers

	Name	Phone	Email
Social Worker:	_____	_____	_____
Supervisor:	_____	_____	_____
District Director:	_____	_____	_____
Foster Parents:	_____	_____	_____
Family Time Coach:	_____	_____	_____
Attorney:	_____	_____	_____
Attorney:	_____	_____	_____
Guardian ad Litem:	_____	_____	_____
Other:	_____	_____	_____

Emergency Numbers

DCF Emergency Services Program (after office hours): 1-800-649-5285

Local Police: _____

Local Crisis Program: _____

Other: _____

This information is important. If you need help understanding it, tell us.

Ova informacija je važna. Ako Vam je potrebna pomoć da je razumijete, obavijestite nas. *(Bosnian)*

ဤသတင်းအချက်အလက်မှာ အလွန်အရေးကြီးပါသည်။ အကယ်၍ နားလည်ရန် အကူအညီလိုပါက ကျွန်ုပ်တို့ကိုပြောပါ။ *(Burmese)*

Ces informations sont importantes. Si vous avez besoin d'aide pour les comprendre, dites-le nous. *(French)*

Iyi n'inkenuzo ngirakamaro. Tubwire, mugihe woba ushaka impfashanyo y'ugusobanukirwa. *(Kirundi)*

यो जानकारी महत्वपूर्ण छ। यदि तपाईंलाई यो बुझ्न सहयोग चाहिएमा, हामीलाई भन्नुहोस्। *(Nepali)*

Macluumaadkan waa muhiim. Haddii aad u baahan tahay caawimaad ah fahanka macluumaadka, noo sheeg. *(Somali)*

Esta información es importante. Si usted necesita ayuda para comprenderla, infórmenos. *(Spanish)*

Maelezo haya ni muhimu. Ikiwa unahitaji msaada wa kuyafahamu, tueleze. *(Swahili)*

Đây là thông tin quan trọng. Nếu quý vị cần trợ giúp để hiểu thông tin này, hay cho chúng tôi biết. *(Vietnamese)*

Family Services Division

District Offices

Barre: (802) 479-4260

Morrisville: (802) 888-4576

Bennington: (802) 442-8138

Newport: (802) 334-6723

Brattleboro: (802) 257-2888

Rutland: (802) 786-5817

Burlington: (802) 863-7370

Springfield: (802) 885-8900

Hartford: (802) 295-8840

St. Albans: (802) 527-7741

Middlebury: (802) 388-4660

St. Johnsbury: (802) 748-8374

Child Abuse Hotline: 1-800-649-5285

<http://dcf.vt.gov/fsd>

Vermont 2-1-1

- Free & confidential information and referral service for everyone in Vermont — 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- Call specialists can help you find government programs, community-based organizations, support groups, and other resources.

Dial 2-1-1 • <http://vermont211.org>

myBenefits.vt.gov

- Find out about public benefits such as 3SquaresVT, Fuel Assistance, & Reach Up;
- Apply online for many benefits; and
- Get details about your benefits — 24/7.

1-800-479-6151 • <http://mybenefits.vt.gov>